

INTER-ALLIED BROADCASTING

If Tom Lewis and AFRS were going to fulfill their mission, they'd have to broadcast to as large an audience of defense personnel as possible. To get that done, AFRS networks and stations had to be established operations by full-time military broadcasters to reach the troops as they moved to the theaters of operation.

THE ARMED FORCES NETWORK (AFN)

The European operation became known as the American Forces Network (AFN). It began with Tom Lewis's trip to Alaska in June, 1942, with Murray Brophy of the War Department's Office of Coordinator of Information. The visit proved to Lewis the great advantage which local radio stations offered over shortwave in the delivery of the AFRS package.

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) provided programs in a language that the American troops could understand. Yet, to the average American serviceman used to the high-powered, star-laden, commercial programs back home, the BBC fare paled in impact. The BBC owned and operated all the radio stations throughout the British Isles. Their limited variety of programming leaned to the heavy classical type of music, drama and literature. There was an almost complete absence of American news, sports and entertainers, and the troops had to contend with the British accents.

The British military accepted the value of providing armed forces radio to its troops. The BBC launched its "Forces Programme" on February 1, 1940. They directed their radio service initially to the British soldiers in France. After Dunkirk, they focused programming on troops garrisoned throughout Great Britain. Finally, the military broadcast became an alternative to the regular BBC schedule not only for the armed forces, but also to the civilian population.

Meanwhile, Lewis and Brophy reached an informal arrangement on how to provide American radio to U.S. troops in Great Britain. As a representative of the COI, Brophy promised to negotiate an agreement with British authorities He'd supply low-powered transmitters, temporary personnel, and arrange for connecting landlines. In turn, Lewis agreed to take over the operation, man it and maintain it, once AFRS had begun to function and could operate overseas facilities.(1)

During a trip to England late in the summer, Brophy met with General George Marshall and discussed the

need to establish an American radio outlet. He emphasized the value of providing American news and entertainment while creating a medium for the Theater Commanding General to communicate with his troops. Since Marshall had been instrumental in establishing AFRS, he supported Brophy's effort. However, the BBC controlled the airwaves. If he was to reach an agreement, Brophy faced more of a diplomatic problem than a military one.(2)

Brophy followed-up his request of Marshall, and sent Brewster Morgan, the organization's Chief of Broadcasting, to England. There, Morgan would prepare a report. He delivered it to General Eisenhower on November 1, 1942. A few days later, Morgan received a call from General E. S. Hughes, the European Theater Deputy Chief of Staff, to come to his office. Hughes told Morgan that the Theater Commander would approve the creation of an American radio network on an experimental basis. They agreed that twelve transmitters would be sufficient for the experiment.(3) Overseas broadcasting was on its way.

The OWI then got an agreement from the BBC. They'd allow the Americans to set up a network "as an additional BBC service." Once the BBC approved the operation, it provided the OWI with facilities. At the same time, the BBC imposed its own program material restrictions on the American broadcasts. These included censorship of questionable lyrics and writings and compliance with British copyright regulations.

With the OWI-BBC agreement in hand, the American Command formally approved the creation of the American Forces Network (AFN) on March 15, 1943. It designated the OWI as the agent to negotiate with the Wireless Telegraphy Board – the British counterpart of the Federal Communications Commission. OWI would work out the details of the agreement. Since British law gave the BBC a monopoly for radio broadcasting, Morgan and Guy Della Cioppa, another OWI employee, had to obtain a waiver to operate. They then received a license from the Wireless Telegraphy Board to establish a broadcasting network of 50-watt transmitters operating on two assigned frequencies.(4)

Morgan and Della Cioppa immediately procured the original equipment for the stations and secured operating agreements between the OWI, the U. S. Army, and the BBC. The OWI ordered twenty-eight of the 50-watt transmitters from the TWT Company in Los Angeles. After AFRS assumed control of the operation, it acquired twenty-five more transmitters from the same company. They borrowed studio equipment and telephone landlines from the BBC.

To install the transmitters and related equipment, the OWI turned to the U.S. Army Signal Corps. Captain

Lloyd Sigmon, who had worked at station KMPC in Los Angeles, had received a direct commission into the Signal Corps. He received orders in late Spring to prepare for an overseas assignment. He was to have sixteen radio engineers under his command. Soon he was in England, but he had not yet received orders detailing how the project was to be accomplished, and he found his men were scattered throughout England doing other work.(5)

Eventually, the OWI tracked down Sigmon, located his men, and directed him to put the first four AFN stations on-the-air by July 4. As Sigmon recalls, the assignment "was ready to do" because the transmitters, made in the United States, came with a complete package. Each included the 50-watt transmitter, the antennas, and other equipment. His most difficult task was to find locations on each base to install the equipment.(6)

Since the BBC didn't want the AFN programs to compete with its own audience in London, no station could be installed in or near England's largest city. The closest an AFN transmitter could be located was Oxford. To provide radio service to American servicemen stationed in London, Sigmon's engineers built an elaborate sound system similar to that used by the Musak Company. This included public address systems in buildings used by the American military, which they connected to AFN Headquarters by landline. The remote transmitters they initially sited were almost exclusively on Air Force bases. In the months before the Normandy invasion, they got transmitters installed in the Army assembly areas. According to Sigmon, the stations were very simple. Despite the low power that theoretically would only reach to the perimeters of the bases, the signal sometimes reached into British homes. During the summer, Sigmon recalls, "American programs could be heard through the open windows."(7)

While the technical work was underway, Morgan drew up detailed plans for an organization that called for OWI personnel to be in charge of the facilities. Army personnel provided the programming.

AFRS created a Board of Directors on June 25, 1943 to supervise the operation. Included were the (Theater) Chief of Special Services and the Special Services Radio Officer, the Chief of Public Relations and the Public Relations Press Officer, the Chief Signal Corps Officer and the Chief of Administration. From the OWI came the Chief Engineer and Chief of Broadcasting Europe.

The Program Committee members included the Theater Public Relations Radio Officer and the Special Services Radio Officer, the OWI Chief of Broadcasting in Europe and a BBC Program Representative. Morgan selected Lieutenant Colonel Charles Gurney to be the Theater Radio Officer. In this capacity Gurney became the first chief of AFN. Captain John Hayes became his

assistant. By May, 1943, they had assembled a staff of four officers and thirteen enlisted men.

Gurney and Hayes adopted their operating philosophy from Murray Brophy's conversations with Eisenhower. These meetings had led the General to approve the creation of AFN in the first place. Captain Hayes later recalled that AFN had received a mandate "to supply American military personnel in Europe with a radio programming service for the information, education and entertainment of such personnel." The radio service itself was to "be as much a duplication of American broadcasting at home as it was possible to achieve overseas."(8)

AFN would be functioning in a war zone. That became an immediate problem in carrying out Eisenhower's directive. As the network was being put together, John Hayes spent considerable time discussing the problem of censorship. He involved the OWI, the BBC, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the U. S. military services. Finally, he reached a consensus with Eisenhower's staff. The only censorship would be in the area of military security. There would be no other censorship "except the self-disciplines exercised by our various program directors concerning taste, tact and the sensibilities of our Allies. The normal restraints of the American system of free broadcasting will also be adopted."(9)

To fill the broadcast schedule, AFN secured program material from the major networks and from local stations across the United States. Some musical entertainment came from the BBC, particularly the BBC Symphony. In addition, AFN secured program material produced in England from local commands and at its own headquarters. AFN had its own news department which got its material from the major wire services and what its staff gathered in the field. Finally, AFN broadcast "informational programming designed to sustain the combat morale of our military services and to supply such personnel with orientation about the nature of the enemy, the necessity for victory, etc. All were prepared by the military program staff at the central headquarters of the American Forces Network."(10)

All the entertainment programming from the United States was to bear the AFRS signature. Likewise, a considerable portion of the information and education material, which the Army produced in Washington, arrived via AFRS. AFN did identify Armed Forces Radio as the primary source of programming. In some cases, announcers eliminated some of the references to AFRS in order to establish the network's own identity. Ultimately, this policy led AFN to become a virtually autonomous operation. Except for overall AFRS, and later AFRTS, policy and the use of broadcast materials from AFRTS, the network remained under the direct control of the

United States Command in Europe until the formation of the Army Broadcasting Service in 1980.

AFN shared with AFRS, the mission of supplying the troops with entertainment, information and news. It also shared the goal of obtaining credibility by insuring an unfettered news operation within the limits of security.

Hayes recalls the conclusions to formulating AFN news policies. "For the American Forces Network to have credibility among the listening audience, no material would be rebroadcast from OWI sources. Neither would they use any material prepared by OWI or by the Psychological Branches of the military or civilian authorities. It seemed quite basic that the AFN should confine itself solely to programming for American military and civilian-attached personnel. If any material broadcast was heard by either ally or enemy, this fact should have no basic consideration in the Network programming."

To Hayes, it became a decision of "cardinal faith that American personnel in the European Theater should never be subjected to any broadcast heard over AFN that might be construed as propaganda. No commentary, news analysis or hard news would be prepared by anyone other than personnel of the American Forces Network. Any other action would have led to the conclusion by the audience that the American Forces Network was being used as a propaganda arm of the Government." (11)

The implementation of these policies began on July 4, 1943, when the Network launched its broadcast day with "The Star Spangled Banner." They located the first AFN studios at 11 Carlos Place in London. By early 1944, the network had increased its schedule to eighty-seven hours a week with about thirty hours coming from AFRS. They allotted seven and one-half hours to news and the rest to locally-produced and BBC programs.

AFRS' Tom Lewis arrived to supervise preparations for American broadcasting to the troops following D-Day. By that time, John Hayes had succeeded Colonel Gurney as OIC of AFN and the headquarters was in the process of moving to 80 Portland Place.

TOP BRASS GET INVOLVED

After the allied invasion, Lewis set about to arrange for AFN broadcasts to the troops. He immediately found himself in the center of a controversy raging at Supreme Headquarters. British and American planners differed radically on the way radio programming should be sent to the troops. Like Boardman in Alaska, Lewis soon discovered that orders from General Osborne (the "civilian general") didn't carry much weight in the theater of operations. As a "reputed communications expert" and the commandant of the American radio operation, Lewis believed that the British position of maintaining a

separate broadcast operation for each nation's military was correct. However, he came into immediate conflict with General Ray Barker, General Eisenhower's Communications Officer. Barker was the author of a plan to combine the separate British, American and Canadian operations into an Allied Expeditionary Forces Radio Program.

According to Lewis, General Barker "believed he'd created something new in a field so new to him, and he held to it despite all opposition." Lewis felt he was "deadlocked in opposition to General Barker because Barker had access to General Eisenhower's ear."

For several weeks, Lewis found himself "blocked and frustrated" by Barker who he felt, "didn't know what the American Armed Forces Radio Service was all about. It was designed to keep American soldiers and sailors in touch with the sounds and news of home -- by means of free, undoctored public communications. By changing the whole concept into a joint British-American mish-mash, he negated everything we'd accomplished so far. I searched my soul for a way to help him understand what mischief his stubbornness could bring to pass." (14)

Lewis introduced a plan of action for AFRS following D-Day. Accompanied by Arthur Page, a civilian consultant to Secretary of War Stimson, he took it to the General. The plan, dated May 20, 1944, called for AFN to use one of the high-powered BBC transmitters on the Channel coast to broadcast to the American troops. The BBC would use the second transmitter for its "General Forces Programme." AFN would man mobile stations attached to each of the advancing American armies. Fixed stations would be installed in France as soon as practicable. (15)

Barker read the proposal. Lewis explained that it would require the General's endorsement and General Eisenhower's signature.

After reading it a second time, Barker responded. "This is, I take it, a complete reversal of the plan of operation I've told you I'm in favor of for radio on D-Day plus."

Lewis responded, "It's a restatement of the plan I outlined to you, Sir, the one upon which the AFRS was founded. It's a plan which I and others competent to judge, believe to be correct. I cannot endorse a plan which my professional judgment tells me is a mistake. It is submitted for General Eisenhower's signature, only, of course, upon your approval, Sir." (16)

Barker's anger was vivid. "I do not approve! Colonel Lewis, career Army men like myself sometimes wonder why it was necessary to give such rank to civilian specialists like yourself when men older than you have worked their entire lives for such rank."

Lewis tried to explain his theory of military rank - about which of course he knew little. Barker vehemently

broke in. "I understand the theory, Colonel Lewis. Now, you understand this. Only one thing wins wars, Colonel, leadership! Not radio leadership, not Madison Avenue leadership, not Hollywood leadership. Military leadership! General Pershing did not need radio speakers in the First World War. Remember that!"

Lewis launched into a statement of his and General Osborne's prejudicial view that radio was important to the success of the war effort. Radio had not existed during World War I, he noted. The issues in that war were comparatively simple. His radio unit and Frank Capra's film unit were trying to tell the United States Armed Forces why they were fighting, who was leading them, the nature of their enemies and the nature of their allies. Their campaign strived "to bring General Eisenhower close to the thousands of men of different nationalities that he now commands." It was a very successful campaign. It brought the Supreme Commander into intimate contact with his men, all his men in the coming invasion, not just his American men.

"Now they know him, they admire him. Among themselves, they call him 'Tke.' He's with them, General, not apart from them. He understands them. He respects and admires their individual nationalistic differences and shares with them our common goals in this war. That's what I'm trying to preserve in this directive. That's what the British themselves are trying to tell us." (17)

It was a well expressed argument. Barker, however, was not impressed. He'd send General Osborne a letter of commendation for Lewis' efforts. Colonel Lewis could deliver it in person, thereby removing him from the events that were about to take place along the French Coast.

Lewis persisted. "Nothing I can say will change your mind about the radio operation, Sir?" Barker didn't answer. Although the general called Lewis as he was about to board his plane at Prestwich, he'd not changed his mind, knowing that the invasion was about to take place. (18)

Lewis fully understood the monopoly which the BBC had on broadcasting in the British Isles. During his stay in England, he "had intensive contact and conversation with the BBC from the Director on down." They agreed that each service should have its own radio operation. However, as Lewis later admitted, he was "too little aware of the decision making process" within Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAPE). If he'd been privy to General Eisenhower's intentions, he might have saved himself the time he spent trying to maintain separate radio services following D-Day, June 6, 1944.

Eisenhower placed priority on integrating the British,

Canadian and American forces under his command. On May 19, 1944, General Barker met with the Minister of Information William Haley, the new Director General of the BBC Brendan Bracken (Barker's counterpart), Brigadier Bosville and American Colonel Edward Kirby. Kirby had just flown in from Washington.

Initially, the discussion centered on securing the release of the BBC transmitter at Start Point, which the combined radio service was to use unencumbered with the BBC policy of program control. (19)

Director-General Bracken informed the group, "The BBC Board of Governors are unanimous that such an allied radio service is impractical. Barker reacted in much the same way he had with Lewis, violent and angry. Eisenhower and his staff had already approved the plan for a unified operation. The meeting here was only to negotiate the terms of a lease for a transmitter, not to debate the plan. The Supreme Commander saw radio as the instrument for reaching all his troops simultaneously, something that couldn't happen if each service had its own broadcast operation. (20)

Bracken told Barker, "You Americans are too sentimentally persuaded. How can we meet the interests and tastes of two different armies with only one service?"

"Let's be practical. For example, you have that fellow Bob Hope, very funny to your people, not funny to ours. Now, we have a fellow named Tommy Trindler [a leading British comic]. I doubt if your people can understand what he is saying, much less laugh at him."

He then reiterated that the BBC Board had never had such "unanimity" on the question. It remained quite "adamant" on the subject. (21)

Barker was not about to accept this as the final word. He told Bracken, "I believe it vital, not only to the winning of this war, but to the welfare of our two peoples to bring them together in bonds of understanding and friendship. Through this Allied radio service, we have the means at hand to lay the foundation. I cannot in good conscience accept the decision of the BBC Board and will so report to General Eisenhower. I shall ask for reconsideration—on the highest level, if necessary." (22)

DECISIONS FROM THE TOP: EISENHOWER CONFRONTS CHURCHILL

In turn, Eisenhower wrote to Churchill making a formal request that the BBC accept the plan for a combined broadcast operation. Churchill wrote to Bracken, giving him two choices: the BBC could undertake the combined operation or give SHAPE the transmitters so that it could establish the joint program service. On the 23rd, Churchill advised Eisenhower that while the BBC still considered the unified broadcast service impractical,

the Board of Governors would be reconvening to consider it. Barker could expect an answer promptly.(23)

Churchill wasn't going to change the BBC mandate through an act of Parliament during wartime, but he did have leverage as Commander-in-Chief of the British war effort. As a result, the BBC gave in. Military experience had won out over civilian opinion.

At the meeting that followed, Minister of Information Haley promptly defined the conditions under which the BBC would accede to General Eisenhower's desire for a combined radio operation. During the wartime crisis, Eisenhower's wishes and policies would "remain paramount at all times as relayed through his radio liaison officer." In the combined operation, the BBC would provide the world news while the cost of the program operation would be shared equally.(24)

On May 24, Haley informed General Barker that he had appointed Maurice Gorham, a long-time BBC executive, as Director of the new BBC service. By then, Kirby had become director of SHAEF Broadcasting Services. In a note to Barker, Haley wrote that Kirby and Gorham "have worked together in the past and, therefore, already know each other." Haley also pledged that since the BBC "has undertaken this service, you may rest assured that every effort we can put forward to ensure its success will be made."(25)

Gorham received his assignment the day after he'd visited Lewis. He'd heard Lewis recount his efforts to change Barker's position. He still maintained that AFN could better cater to the American troops.

Gorham reviewed the file of correspondence between SHAEF and the BBC, which he'd received from Haley. He discovered that the service was supposed to begin on D-Day. He found his to be "a large order" because no one knew when D-Day would take place. Gorham also found that the BBC had requested some staff from SHAEF and submitted a list of people, but no one had arrived.

The BBC had already given Gorham the transmitter at Start Point, an assigned frequency and a diagram of the area the transmitter would reach in France. The map turned out to be a good outline of the actual D-Day invasion area. It explained the unusual secrecy of the whole project.(26)

Gorham started his organization with no offices, no studios and no plans, although the BBC expeditiously gave him facilities in their Broadcasting House on Portland Place. Establishing the program side proved more difficult. According to the agreement, he could call on the BBC and AFN to supply programming. To get started, he called a meeting with Kirby, John Hayes, Robert Light (also from AFN), the BBC Controller of the General Forces Programme and Gerry Wilmot of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. The group began

laying out a seventeen-hour daily broadcast schedule.(27) Quickly, a problem developed.

INTER-ALLIED BROADCASTING: THE ALLIED EXPEDITIONARY FORCES PROGRAMME (AEFP)

Gorham informed the Americans that the radio service would be known as the "Allied Expeditionary Forces Programme of the BBC." Although he explained that BBC had stipulated that title, Colonel Kirby and other SHAEF Officers continued to object during the planning phase of the AEFP. When the agreement between SHAEF and the BBC seemed to start unraveling, General Barker met with Kirby, Haley and Gorham to resolve the problem on May 29. According to Gorham, Haley "gave a wonderful display of tough negotiation." The BBC prevailed, although the phrase "of the BBC" would become both an irritant and a source of confusion to the American Soldiers. The only change was that the AEFP was to begin the day after D-Day.(28)

Besides the transmitter, the BBC provided Gorham with technical facilities and office accommodations. AFN provided a portion of the staff and about half of the programming. The BBC supplied 45% and the Canadian military radio operation about 5%.

Despite the short time to prepare, the AEFP was ready to go on the air by June 7 (the day after D-Day). The opening announcement set forth the mission that would guide the operation throughout its existence:

"We are initiating today a radio broadcasting service for the members of the Allied Expeditionary Forces. We shall call this service the AEF Program. It is to be a service especially prepared for you and we shall try to make it of a character suited to your needs. Its purpose is threefold: To link you with your homes by news broadcasts from the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States; to give you the latest news from the war fronts and the world events; and finally, to offer you diversion and relation during those precious few moments of leisure from the main job at hand. For this latter purpose, we shall bring you the best entertainment that can be summoned from our Allied nations. The BBC has given generously its resources and skilled personnel. The American Forces Network and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation are working closely with the BBC in this project, making it a truly inter-Allied effort. As we go forward together to victory, the AEF program will be constantly within your reach, serving you, we hope, in a manner worthy of your deeds."

Despite creation of the AEFP, the American AFN retained its network in England. It continued to provide the complete AFRS package to U. S. airbases and to the American soldiers at their staging areas. Once the

advance began across Europe, AFN would provide mobile radio stations to accompany U. S. troops with entertainment, news and sports.

In the end, AFRS managed to provide service to American fighting men in the same way as Lewis had tried to sell to General Barker. However, or most of the men fighting on the continent, the AEF, with AFRS support, became a primary source of entertainment.

Even considering the complexities of international leadership, Lewis' people remained steadfast in their efforts to provide "a little bit of home" for the Americans.

NOTES - CHAPTER 10

- (1) Savage, *Progress Report*.
- (2) Colonel Theo Arter to Commanding General, ETOUSA, March 12, 1943.
- (3) Ibid.
- (4) Ibid.
- (5) Interview with Lloyd Sigmon on July 3, 1983.
- (6) Ibid.
- (7) Ibid.
- (8) John Hayes, President, Washington Post Broadcasting, to John Seigenthaler, Editor, *The Nashville Tennessean*, November 22, 1963.
- (9) Ibid.
- (10) Hayes to Seigenthaler, *op.cit.*
- (11) Ibid.
- (12) Ibid.
- (13) Proposed Plan for Radio coverage for Forthcoming Military Operation, European Theatre of Operations, May 20, 1944.
- (14) Lewis, Unpublished Autobiography.
- (15) Ibid.
- (16) Ibid.
- (17) *Star-Spangled Radio*, p. 137.
- (18) Ibid.
- (19) Ibid.
- (20) Ibid.
- (21) Ibid p 139; Maurice Gorham, *Sound and Fury*, p 140.
- (22) *Star-Spangled Radio*, pp 140-41.
- (23) Ibid, p 142.
- (24) Gorham, pp 140-41.
- (25) Ibid pp 143-44; *Star-Spangled Radio*, pp 142-43.
- (26) Gorham, p 144.